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ABSTRACT

During 1980, Black Hawk Community College conducted a follow-up study of the 92 students who had graduated with an Associate in Liberal Arts (ALS) degree since 1973. The degree differs from the college's more traditional degrees in emphasizing less restrictive residency requirements, opportunities to develop a personalized course of instruction, and procedures for granting credit for prior, non-sponsored learning. The study involved an examination of student records to determine: (1) a demographic profile of the graduates; (2) their college grade point average; (3) the average length of their enrollment prior to receiving the ALS; (4) the percentage who had received a general education equivalency diploma rather than a high school diploma; and (5) the number of graduates who had used the College Level Examination Program, proficiency tests, or transfer credits to complete ALS requirements. A mailed survey of the graduates was also conducted to determine the degree to which graduates had used nontraditional modes of instruction, such as cable television and independent study, graduate perceptions of the effect of the ALS on career, earnings, and the quality of life; and the proportion of ALS graduates who subsequently enrolled in a baccalaureate program. The study report reviews literature dealing with nontraditional degree programs, details findings and compares them to those of a similar 1976 study, and outlines recommendations. (JP)

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EIGHT-YEAR FOLLOW-UP STUDY
BLACK HAWK COLLEGE'S
NON-TRADITIONAL DEGREE GRADUATES

by

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Black Hawk College, Moline, Illinois

March 27, 1981

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ABSTRACT

Eight-Year Follow-Up Study of Black Hawk College's Non-Traditional Degree Graduates

by Mary A. Stevens

In 1972, Black Hawk College, Moline, Illinois, was designated as a community college in Illinois to test on a pilot basis a new associate in liberal studies (A.L.S.) degree program. The A.L.S. degree differs from the college's more traditional degrees in emphasizing and allowing for the use of more methods for crediting the prior, non-sponsored learning of degree candidates; by minimizing college residency requirements; and by allowing students, with the assistance and approval of an advisor, to design a personalized course of study to fulfill their specific educational goals. It seeks to resemble John Valley's "complex-systems model" for external degrees, consciously parallels the program at Minnesota Metropolitan State College in its competency requirements, and emphasizes the faculty academic advisor as mentor in ways similar to those found in the SUNY-Empire State program.

The A.L.S. degree program was intended to serve highly-motivated adult students with an academic goal that could be better served by a specially-designed course of study than by one of the college's more traditional degrees. A follow-up study of graduates from the A.L.S. degree program was completed in 1976, and, based partly upon its results, the College's faculty senate made some modifications in the degree program in 1977. This report describes a second follow-up study of all 92 A.L.S. graduates for an eight-year period from 1973 to 1980.

The study was completed by a review of college records and degree contracts for graduates and by a questionnaire mailed to all graduates. These methods provided data on the significant demographic characteristics of graduates, the number of graduates for each year, the percentage of graduates who had used non-traditional modes of instruction or who had received credit other than by enrollment in Black Hawk College classes, the proportion of graduates who subsequently enrolled in a bachelor degree program, and the graduates' perceptions of whether or not the degree had fulfilled their personal educational goals.

Graduates were found to be, in the majority, above 25 years of age and to have either "stopped out" of college or completed it on a part-time basis. There were slightly more women graduates than men. Thirty-five percent of the college credit applied toward the A.L.S. degrees had come from sources other than Black Hawk College classes: transfer credit, departmental proficiency and validation procedures, the College Level Examination Program, or military service credit. Almost 74% of those graduates responding to the questionnaire had made use of one of Black Hawk College's non-traditional delivery modes in completing the degree. Over 42% of those responding had enrolled subsequently in a bachelor degree program, almost all in Western Illinois University's local external BOG degree program, and almost all those responding reported that they perceived personal improvement and that they had gained personal satisfaction from the degree. Many reported career advancement and increased earnings as well.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In 1972, the Illinois Community College Board and the Illinois Board of Higher Education, in their reports to the State Legislature, encouraged institutions of postsecondary education

to begin the assessment and the subsequent reallocation of dollars to higher priority programs--a reassessment and allocation, which undoubtedly, should be undertaken even without the pressure of fiscal constraints.

Thus, at that time, through appropriate district administrative and committee structures, Black Hawk College assessed its certificate and degree programs to determine their present and future direction. Included in the reassessment and decision-making process was consideration of the list of high and low program priorities developed by the Illinois Board of Higher Education in its Fiscal 1973 Budget Recommendations of Higher Education Programs.

Black Hawk College's reassessment of existing certificate and degree programs resulted in the elimination of readily identifiable upper-division courses, the realignment of adult continuing education courses and programs, the development of additional remedial and developmental courses, the discontinuation of the associate in applied arts degree, and a redesignation of the associate in general education degree as the associate in liberal studies degree (A.L.S.). This redesignation was intended to provide greater responsiveness to those students who had been historically excluded from postsecondary education because of age, sex, economic, social, or geographic location.

The development of the associate in liberal studies degree program and its subsequent approval by the Illinois Board of Higher Education resulted in Black Hawk College's being designated as a community college in Illinois to test the pilot liberal studies program. In 1972, the college made a commitment to monitor the development of the program and to report its findings to the

Illinois Board of Higher Education. This evaluation and report was completed by Charles E. Laws, Dean of Liberal Studies, in 1976.¹

The stated purposes of the associate in liberal studies degree have always been to serve students who have the following characteristics:

1. Of an age over 25 years old, and, therefore, with considerable experience in roles other than that of a student.
2. Highly motivated academically but not toward academic traditional degree programs, although perhaps with a desire to continue on for a baccalaureate degree.
3. Possessing a sense of self-focus and a capability to tailor a degree to meet their needs.
4. Possessing a high school diploma or a general education diploma.
5. With an academic goal which is better served by the liberal studies degree than by one of the existing degree structures.

The qualities cited above of the students intended to be served by the associate in liberal studies degree essentially define the nature of the clientele to be served by this degree program.

Laws' study of 1976 found that Black Hawk College had been meeting the stated purposes of its degree program and had been serving well those students for whom the program was intended. Students enrolled in the program were generally over 25 years of age, possessed prior learning experiences, were academically motivated, and were capable of tailoring a degree to meet their own educational needs. Additionally, the students were high school graduates and were better served by the associate in liberal studies degree than by existing on-campus degrees.

¹Charles E. Laws, "Three-Year Follow-Up Study of Black Hawk College's Non-Traditional Degree Recipients," Black Hawk College, Moline, Illinois, 1976, unpublished paper.

At that time, the recommendations of this report included the following:

1. That the college's admission procedures for the A.L.S. degree students be revised to increase faculty participation.
2. That the recruitment procedures for the A.L.S. degree program be revised and that the characteristics of its graduates be used as a basis for development of a new recruitment plan.
3. That the core requirements of the program be re-evaluated by the faculty senate (Quad-Cities Campus), utilizing the findings of the study.

In summary, Laws' study substantiated the need for the continuance and expansion of the college's associate in liberal studies degree program. Prior to the completion of the study, little was known about the characteristics of the associate in liberal studies graduates or the academic patterns they chose and pursued to complete the program.

Subsequent to Laws' study, and in part as a result of it, in 1977, the Quad-Cities Campus faculty senate completed a study of the associate in liberal studies degree program and modified the program slightly. The major modification included the addition of competency areas to ensure that the degree possessed breadth as well as depth. Students receiving the degree must now verify their competency in the following areas: communication and learning skills, physical and emotional well-being, the humanities, the social sciences, and the sciences and mathematics. Generally, students satisfy these competency requirements by the completion of appropriate courses or by satisfactory scores on CLEP examinations. Thus, the third recommendation from Laws' study--that the program's core curriculum be re-evaluated by the faculty senate --has been accomplished.

At the time of the curriculum review, the faculty senate also very carefully considered the differences between the associate in liberal studies

degree and the traditional associate degrees granted by the college. They found the major differences between them to be as follows:

1. CLEP subject examination credit may be applied more easily to the A.L.S. degree than to traditional degrees.
2. The A.L.S. degree has less restrictive residency requirements than other degrees. Students earning the A.L.S. degree must complete a minimum of ten semester hours in residence at Black Hawk College, and these hours do not necessarily have to be the last ten hours of college work toward the degree.
3. The A.L.S. degree allows more flexibility in relation to general education requirements than other degrees.
4. Through established agreements with college departments and divisions, the A.L.S. degree allows students to apply credit equivalency based upon successful completion of diploma schools of nursing and radiologic technology programs toward an associate degree.
5. The A.L.S. degree allows students to apply considerable credit from courses in the career programs not applicable toward other degrees, including credit earned through apprentice and certificate programs, if such course work is necessary for the fulfillment of their educational goals and needs.
6. The A.L.S. degree provides students an opportunity to develop non-specialized plans of course work, often of an interdisciplinary nature, leading to an associate degree.

Subsequent to these findings by the college's faculty senate, and in part as a result of them, the other two recommendations from Laws' study have been implemented: admissions procedures to increase faculty participation and a recruitment plan based upon the characteristics of past graduates. Placement of the A.L.S. degree program in an academic division in 1977 and review and acceptance of the program by the college's faculty senate in the same year have resulted in increased credibility for the degree program among the faculty and have made possible the recruitment and training of faculty members as academic advisors for the A.L.S. degree. And, data on graduates have guided subsequent new recruitment plans by clearly identifying the clientele served by the degree in marketing efforts.

The purpose of this study is to follow-up once again upon Black Hawk College graduates in the A.L.S. degree program to determine whether or not events subsequent to Laws' study have affected the clientele served by the degree or the success of the degree in meeting graduates' needs and expectations.

II. THE PROBLEM

This follow-up study had the same following specific objectives as the Laws' study of 1976:

1. To survey related literature that identifies the characteristics of non-traditional degree programs and students.
2. To survey significant demographic characteristics of graduates of the associate in liberal studies degree program--i.e., age, sex, length of enrollment prior to receiving a degree, and method of gaining high school equivalency.

This follow-up study had the additional specific objectives:

1. To determine the number of graduates in the A.L.S. degree program for each year.
2. To determine the degree to which graduates in the A.L.S. degree program used non-traditional modes of instruction for the completion of coursework--i.e., "Study Unlimited,"¹ cable television classes, and regular classes held off-campus.
3. To determine the degree to which graduates in the A.L.S. degree program used the College Level Examination Program (CLEP), college proficiency tests, and transfer credit to complete requirements.
4. To determine the mean cumulative grade point for work completed at Black Hawk College by students earning the A.L.S. degree and the mean number of hours that these graduates did complete in residence and had applied to degree requirements.
5. To determine the A.L.S. graduates' preception of the effect that the degree had had upon their careers, earnings, and degree of personal satisfaction.
6. To determine the proportion of A.L.S. graduates who enrolled in a bachelor degree program after completing their work at Black Hawk College.
7. To make any recommendations in relation to the degree program based upon findings.

¹The college's cooperative program with area public libraries to offer self-paced, individualized instruction off-campus or at home.

Follow-up studies with such objectives serve to ensure that degree programs continue their viability--serving the needs of the clientele for whom they were intended.

III. REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF LITERATURE

Perhaps the most complete and probably the definitive description of the non-traditional degree is Cyril Houle's The External Degree.¹ Houle offers the following definition of the external degree:

An external degree is one awarded to an individual on the basis of some program of preparation (devised either by himself or by an educational institution) which is not centered on traditional patterns of residential collegiate or university study.²

Houle further distinguishes the external degree from the extension degree, which is offered off-campus but which is essentially the same in requirements as the residence degree, and the adult degree, which is focused directly upon adult preferences and interests.³ The external degree, conversely, emphasizes "flexible time/space higher education" and opportunities for students to receive credit by assessment.⁴

Black Hawk College's associate in liberal studies degree is closer to an external degree as thus defined than any other of the college's degree programs. It requires the least number of hours in residence (10 semester hours); these hours do not have to be the last ten hours earned; there is no time limit on degree work; students may apply credit earned in CLEP subject examinations to the A.L.S. degree not readily applicable to other college degrees; students are encouraged to seek validation of prior learning through college departments

¹San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974.

²Ibid., p. 15.

³Ibid.,

⁴S.K. Bailey, "Flexible Time-Space Programs: A Plea for Caution," in D. W. Vermilye (Ed.), The Expanded Campus: Current Issues in Higher Education 1972 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1972), pp.172-173. Cited by Houle, op. cit., p. 15.

and to make full use of off-campus and home study classes; inter-institutional agreements are established to recognize by college credit for the A.L.S. degree programs in nursing and radiologic technology; and the degree agreement is personalized and built upon the student's unique goals and needs.

John R. Valley ¹ has delineated six models for external degree programs. The administrative-facilitation model, which is the simplest and most common, is one in which the institution holds to its traditional degree program but provides services, an organizational structure, and procedures that enable non-traditional students, especially those adults who enroll part-time and offcampus, to complete degree requirements. A good example of an institution following such a model is Chicago TV College.

The modes-of-learning model resembles the administrative-facilitation model in its use of non-traditional course delivery modes, such as television, but it adjusts its traditional degree program's pattern to suit the capacities, circumstances, and interests of a new clientele, usually part-time adult students. General education requirements may still be found in the modes-of-learning model, but, usually, they will be less specific and more flexible than in traditional degrees. Recognizing that most students will be adults employed full-time, institutions following this model will often break instruction into segments or modules, thereby reducing the pace and extending the time frame. Considerable use is made of guided independent study and area seminars. Perhaps the best examples of this model are the University of Oklahoma's bachelor of liberal studies degree and the British Open University.

¹John R. Valley, "External Degree Programs," in Samuel B. Gould and K. Patricia Cross (Eds.), Explorations in Non-Traditional Study (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1972), pp. 95-125.

The examination model, such as that followed by the New York State Board of Regents and the University of London, grants degree totally by examination. An institution following such a model may offer no formal courses.

In the validation model, Valley's fourth class, the institution or agency evaluates prior learning experience based upon its own concept of what learning should have occurred for degree equivalency and then indicates, based upon the same concept, what additional requirements the student needs to complete to receive the degree. Such a model was presented in the plan proposed in 1971 by the Academy for Educational Development for an International University for Independent Study.

The credits model is similar to the validation and the examination models in its emphasis upon the assessment of prior learning as a basis for the granting of a degree and in the likelihood that an agency or institution following such a model would not actually offer instruction. It differs from these previous two models in that it awards credits and degrees based upon its own evaluation of the quality of the method by which students have completed prior learning. Although no example of an institution following the credits model in all respects is found in the United States, the Commission on Accreditation of Service Experiences (CASE) of the American Council on Education is close to this model. In its Guides, CASE makes recommendations for the awarding of college credit for instruction that a student has received in the military services and, in doing so, it thoroughly reviews these military training programs. CASE differs from the credits model, first, in that it only makes credit recommendations and does not grant credit and, further, in that it has limited its work for the most part to military instruction, although in the last four years it has begun to make more recommendations for education in proprietary, correspondence, and private industry schools.

Finally, Valley delineated what he termed the complex-systems model. This model, although in some ways a continuation of the five previous simpler modes, does result in a program that has served to reshape an agency's or institution's services to meet the needs of new, previously unserved, clientele for new ways to earn college credit and degrees. A good example cited by Valley of an institution following the complex-systems model is Empire State College. This new institution, located in the state of New York, has an administrative staff and a faculty, but no campus. It uses borrowed facilities and the New York Educational Television Network to offer instruction through a variety of modes. It screens and tests to determine a student's proper entry level; it provides counseling at learning centers throughout the state; and it offers correspondence and independent study courses.

Cyril Houle draws upon Valley's classification in his description of the current status of external degree programs.¹ He then describes what he considers to be exemplary programs: the Regents External Degree, established by the New York State Education Department; the SUNY-Empire State program; Minnesota Metropolitan State College; Florida International University; the Community College of Vermont; the Extended University of the University of California; California state universities and colleges; the University without Walls, sponsored by the Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities headquartered at Antioch College in Ohio; and the Central New York Regional Learning Service.² Of special relevance to Black Hawk College's A.L.S. degree programs are the SUNY-Empire State program and Minnesota Metropolitan State College.

¹Houle, pp. 91-94.

²Ibid., pp. 94-119.

The SUNY-Empire State program utilizes six instructional modes: formal courses, cooperative studies, tutorials, organized self-instructional programs, direct experience, and independent study. Each student works closely with a mentor, a faculty member who guides his or her work and agrees to its emphasis. The degree is awarded when the student completes a program of study agreed to by the mentor at a level of competence that meets college standards.¹

The Minnesota Metropolitan State College cooperates and collaborates with existing public and private postsecondary institutions in the Minneapolis-St. Paul urban area to provide an upper-division, degree-granting institution as authorized in 1971 by the Minnesota state legislature. Students wishing to enroll must have already completed the equivalent of two years of work and must then develop a degree contract with the assistance of an advisor and a committee, both of which review the plan. Each student must demonstrate competency in the following areas: basic learning skills, civic skills, cultural-recreational competencies, vocational competencies, and personal and social awareness. Prior to receiving a degree, a student must present to a final assessment committee acceptable evidence of his or her success in achieving these competencies.²

In 1977, when the Quad-Cities Campus faculty senate reviewed its degree structure, the author of this study served as chairman of the subcommittee assigned to consideration of the A.L.S. degree, and she utilized Valley's and Houle's discussion classification as two bases for guiding the subcommittee's work.

As a result of this subcommittee's work, competency areas similar to those required by Minnesota Metropolitan State College were included within the

¹Houle, pp. 97-100.

²Ibid., pp. 100-104

A.L.S. degree to ensure breadth as well as depth. The only major variation was the omission of the vocational competencies. Because many A.L.S. degree candidates desire a degree for personal reasons, such a requirement seemed too restrictive. At the same time, vocational competency would be addressed, if necessary, in that section of the A.L.S. agreement in which courses are selected to provide a means for satisfying a student's specific goals, if these goals did actually include job-related skills or knowledge.

In addition, the subcommittee's work and subsequent work with faculty advisors for the A.L.S. degree have emphasized the importance of the student and advisor relationship, a relationship in many ways similar to that found in the student-mentor relationship in the SUNY-Empire State program.

Since 1977 as well, these two models have provided guidance for Black Hawk College's A.L.S. program. Continuing efforts have resulted in the availability to students in the A.L.S. program of all six modes of instruction emphasized in the SUNY-Empire State program: formal courses, cooperative studies, tutorials, organized self-instructional programs, direct experience, and independent study. In 1980, two new liberal studies courses--one in internship and one in field study--were implemented, and students may make unrestricted use of independent study as long as such use is consistent with their goals and is approved by their advisor.

Increasingly through the years, Black Hawk College's A.L.S. degree has been and has been intended to be an example of Valley's complex-systems model, one containing elements of the other five models. In a number of ways, the A.L.S. degree contains elements of the administrative-facilitation model. Academic advisement for A.L.S. students is intended to be personalized and long-term and to take considerable time. The degree agreement is personalized and

provides considerable variation from traditional patterns, including residency requirements. A considerable number and variety of off-campus, television, home study, independent study, and work experience course options are available to students, who are encouraged to make use of them; thus, the A.L.S. degree program resembles the modes-of-learning model. Students in the A.L.S. degree program are encouraged and assisted in gaining credit for prior learning through CLEP, Guide recommendations, validation procedures, and departmental proficiency examinations. In these ways, the degree resembles the examination, validation, and credits models. Because of these characteristics of the A.L.S. degree, through it, Black Hawk College has been designated a Servicemen's Opportunity College.

A grant deal has been written concerning the clientele for whom non-traditional or external degrees are intended. In Diversity by Design, the Commission on Non-Traditional Study focused attention upon adult learners. Its research suggested that as high as 76.8 percent of adults are interested in learning more--the so-called "would-be learners."¹ The same research suggested that as high as 30.9 percent were actually involved in adult continuing education--the "learners."² The Commission then sought reasons for the considerable difference in numbers between "would-be learners" and "learners" and found

...to a very large number of American adults, education--however much desired--is still too costly, too rigid in its formal requirements, and too inaccessible at the places and times it is needed.³

This finding resulted in a number of specific recommendations by the Commission, including the sorts of innovations found in external degrees.

¹Diversity by Design, Report of the Commission on Non-Traditional Study, Samuel B. Gould, chairman (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975), p. 15.

²Ibid., p. 16.

³Ibid., p. 19.

Houle has described the adult student clientele for external degrees in considerable detail. These students are adults "who were born too early to take advantage of the widespread opportunities made available to younger men and women through the expansion of facilities of higher learning." Now, "caught up in the pressures and concerns of mature life," they seek educational opportunities and credentials.¹ In terms of educational attainment, white males have traditionally succeeded best. Even though more girls than boys complete high school, more males enter and complete college, and whites "markedly exceed" non-whites in the number of years of school completed. Thus, women and members of racial and ethnic minority groups are important clientele for higher education.² In addition, a large number of the clientele for external degrees can be expected to come from those who have "dropped-out" or "stopped-out" of school, and studies suggest that many do so because of the "three major barriers to higher education": low academic aptitude as measured by tests, low socioeconomic status, and membership in the female sex.³ Those individuals who drop out of high school and subsequently gain high school equivalency by means of the GED test share these characteristics, and it has been noted that these individuals are also considered important clientele for the external degree.⁴

¹Houle, p. 46.

²Ibid., p. 50.

³Ibid., p. 54.

⁴Ibid., p. 58.

Houle also notes that the clientele for the external degree can also include youth who find the flexibility and accessibility of this degree attractive.¹ That the Commission on Non-Traditional Study anticipated such a clientele is clear in its recommendation.

Students of traditional college age should have available to them the same non-traditional opportunities as adult students, including the external degree.²

Consistent with original degree objectives, Black Hawk College's A.L.S. degree program should be expected to serve the same clientele as that identified in the literature as the population targeted to be served by external degrees: adults, women, members of ethnic and racial minority groups, those who have gained high school equivalent by the GED, educational "drop-outs" and "stop-outs," those from low socioeconomic levels with low academic aptitude as measured by tests and youth attracted by unique characteristics of the degree.

¹Houle, p. 60.

²Diversity by Design, p. 33

IV. METHODS

1. Black Hawk College transcripts for all students who have received the A.L.S. degree according to division records degree were requested from the college registrar. These covered commencements from 1973 to 1980. These transcripts provided the following data: method of gaining high school equivalency; total number of college credits earned at Black Hawk College and at other accredited postsecondary institutions, number of hours earned by means of CLEP and college proficiency and validation procedures, the date on which all Black Hawk College credit was awarded, the date on which the A.L.S. degree was conferred, and cumulative grade point average for Black Hawk College work.
2. A.L.S. degree agreements were secured from division files for each of those students who had been listed in college commencement programs from 1972 to 1980 as having earned the A.L.S. degree. These degree agreements provided the following data: birthdate of student, date of the degree agreement, and sex.
3. All students in the survey group were surveyed by mail in January, 1981. A copy of the survey instrument is included in Appendix A and of the cover letter in Appendix B. A self-addressed, prepaid envelope was included. Surveys each contained an identifying number to assist in follow-up. This survey provided the following data: the student's perception of whether or not his or her stated educational goal was met through the A.L.S. degree program; the student's perception of whether or not receiving the A.L.S. degree had resulted in any of the following--increase in earnings, upward movement in occupation, change in position or classification, personal satisfaction and improvement, and change in occupation; student's

report of whether or not he or she had enrolled in a bachelor's degree program and, if so, a report of the institution; and the student's report of non-traditional modes of instruction that were used in completing the A.L.S. degree.

4. Approximately four weeks after this mailing, a repeat mailing was made to all those who could be successfully reached by mail but who had not responded. A copy of the cover letter used in this mailing is included in Appendix C. Once again, a self-addressed, prepaid envelope was included. This follow-up mailing did not include letters to those students who had not responded because they could not be reached by mail, their letters having been returned as non-deliverable by the post office.
5. Data collected in these manners were then tabulated and analyzed as follows:
 - Total numbers responding to the survey, of those not responding, and of those who could not be reached by mail were tabulated; and percentages of each group were calculated.
 - The number of those graduating from high school and of those gaining high school equivalency through the GED was tabulated, and percentages of both were tabulated.
 - Total number of college semester hours earned at Black Hawk College and at transfer institutions was tabulated and then a mean number of hours per graduate was calculated for each in both categories.
 - Total number of hours earned through CLEP, through college validation and proficiency procedures and through military service credit were tabulated and then a mean number of hours was calculated for all categories.

- A mean cumulative grade point average for Black Hawk College work was calculated.
- The mean, mode, and median numbers of years between date of A.L.S. degree contract and date of graduation with an A.L.S. degree were calculated with all data rounded up or down to the closest half-year(s).
- Similar mean, mode, and median numbers of years between initial enrollment at Black Hawk College and graduation with an A.L.S. degree were calculated with all data rounded up or down to the closest half-year(s).
- The number of those graduates in either sex was tabulated, and percentages of both were calculated.
- The mean and median ages at which graduates completed their A.L.S. contracts was calculated as well as the percentage of graduates who had completed these contracts at age 25 or younger.
- The number of graduates in each calendar year from 1973 through 1980 was tabulated and a percentage for each year's total was calculated.
- Those survey responses providing the graduate's perception of whether or not he or she believed that his or her stated educational goal had been met through the A.L.S. degree were tabulated, and percentages for both groups were calculated.
- Those survey responses providing the graduate's perception of whether or not the A.L.S. degree had resulted in specific benefits were tabulated, and percentages for each possible benefit were calculated.
- Those survey responses reporting whether or not the graduate had subsequently enrolled in a bachelor's degree program were tabulated, and a percentage of the total respondents was calculated.

- Those survey responses reporting the transfer institution in which the graduate enrolled were tabulated, and the three most frequent responses were noted.
 - Those survey responses reporting specific non-traditional modes of instruction used in completing the degree were tabulated and, then, the percentage of graduates responding who used each mode as well as those using none of them was calculated.
6. This data tabulation and analysis provided the following follow-up information as suggested by the study's objectives:
- Information on significant demographic characteristics of graduates --age, sex, length of enrollment prior to receiving a degree, and method of gaining high school equivalency. (Reliable data is not readily available from college files on student's membership in racial and minority groups.)
 - The number of graduates in the A.L.S. degree program for each year up to 1980.
 - The percentage of graduates who used non-traditional modes of instruction to complete coursework.
 - The degree to which graduates had used CLEP, college proficiency tests, validation procedures, military service credit, and transfer credit to complete requirements.
 - The mean cumulative grade point average for Black Hawk College work for graduates.
 - The graduates' perceptions of whether or not the degree had fulfilled their personal educational goals.
 - The graduate's perception of the effect that the degree had had upon their careers, earnings, and degree of personal satisfaction.

- The proportion of A.L.S. graduates who had subsequently enrolled in a bachelor degree program and the three most frequently cited transfer institutions.

7. Based upon this follow-up information, the continued success of the A.L.S. degree in meeting the following needs was evaluated:

- Its success in serving the traditional clientele for external degrees --women, adults, those having GED certificates, educational "drop-outs" or "stop-outs," the part-time student, and those with low academic aptitude as suggested by cumulative grade point averages. If such a clientele is not being served, degree recruitment must be modified.
- Its success in meeting students' traditional educational goals as perceived by graduates. If a large number are not satisfied, changes in screening of students and advisement are necessary.
- The degree to which graduates actually continue at a transfer institution and the identification of the most common such transfer institution. If a number of A.L.S. graduates are continuing to work for a bachelor's degree at traditional institutions, degree-screening methods have been ineffective.
- The degree's vitality and the success of recruitment efforts as demonstrated by gradual increases in annual number of graduates.
- The degree's success in accelerating the student's progress toward commencement validation of prior learning as reflected in the degree to which graduates had used CLEP, college proficiency tests and validation procedures, and transfer credit in satisfying degree requirements. If the use seems low, changes in advisement and the screening of students are necessary.

- The degree to which graduates utilized non-traditional modes of instruction in completing degree requirements. A relatively low degree of us would suggest the absence of adequate and accessible non-traditional course options and possible errors in academic advisement.
8. Based upon this follow-up information, recommendations in relation to the A.L.S. degree were developed.

V. RESULTS

Table 1 below summarizes the response rates to the mailed questionnaires and cover letters:

Table 1
Summary of Response Rates

	First Mailing	Second Mailing	Total	Percent
Total Returned Completed	44	5	49	53.3
Total Returned Undeliverable	24	0	24	26.1
Total Not Returned	<u>24</u>	19	43	<u>26.7</u>
Totals	92			100.1

Because Black Hawk College makes no planned or consistent effort to maintain up-to-date addresses of its graduates, follow-up studies such as this one are always difficult to complete with validity. In this survey, a total of 26.1% of graduates could not be reached by mail because they had moved from the address they last used at the college and no forwarding address was available. As a result, even though 49 graduates returned a completed questionnaire, 72.1% of those who had received it by mail, this number represented only 53.3% of all graduates, the rest being unreachable. Because over 70% of those who could be reached by mail had responded to the survey the response rate was judged adequate for validity in most respects, with exceptions noted.

Table 2 summarizes the results of a survey of the college records of all 92 graduates to determine the method by which they had completed high school or had gained high school equivalency.

Table 2
Method of Completing High School

	Number	Percent
High School Graduation	89	96.7
G.E.D. Examination	3	3.3
Total	92	100.0

The vast majority of graduates in this study had graduated from high school--96.7%, and only 3, or 3.3%, had gained high school equivalency by means of the G.E.D. examination.

Table 3 below summarizes the total number of semester hours used for graduation from Black Hawk College by all 92 members of the survey population and the number of such hours in each of the possible categories tallied: Black Hawk College courses, CLEP, college validation and proficiency procedures, transfer credit, and military service credit.

Table 3
Sources of College Credit

	Number of Hours*	Number of Graduates in Group	Mean for Graduates in Group	% of Total Credit
Black Hawk Classes	4,465.50	92	48.54	65.11
Transfer Credit	1,438.59	47	30.61	29.98
Black Hawk Proficiency	476.50	25	19.06	6.95
CLEP Credit	337.00	22	15.32	4.91
Military Service Credit**	141.00	23	6.13	2.06
Total	6,858.59	92	74.55	100.01

* All calculated as semester hours.

** Upon request, Black Hawk College will award veterans four hours of credit for military physical education and two hours for military health/hygiene education. In a few other cases, credit is awarded for military service education without the use of departmental proficiency and validation procedures, but these instances are not frequent.

By far, the most common source of credit applied to the A.L.S. degree by students in the survey group was credit earned in Black Hawk College courses. On the average, each graduate earned over 48 semester hours of such credit, which accounted for over 65% of all credit applied to A.L.S. degrees. The second most frequent source of credit was that received by transfer from other accredited institutions. Forty-seven of the 92 in the survey group had received average transfer credit of over 30 semester hours, and this source accounted for almost 22% of all credit applied to A.L.S. degrees. Twenty-five of A.L.S. graduates had received credit by means of Black Hawk College departmental proficiency and validation procedures, each receiving an average of approximately 19 hours of credit in this way. Credit earned by departmental proficiency and validation procedures accounted for close to 7% of all credit applied to A.L.S. degrees by those included in this study. Twenty-two of the A.L.S. graduates had received credit through CLEP, each earning an average of 15.32 hours in this way. CLEP credit accounts for almost 5% of all credit applied to A.L.S. degrees. Twenty-three of the 92 A.L.S. graduates in this study were veterans who received military service credit, on the average of 6.13 semester hours each. Credit earned in this way accounted for just over 2% of all credit applied to A.L.S. degrees.

In summary, the 92 graduates included in this study applied a total of 6,858.59 semester hours of college credit to their A.L.S. degrees, an average of 74.55 semester hours per graduate.

This survey also provided a mean of the cumulative grade point averages for the 4,465.50 semester hours of college credit that the 92 A.L.S. graduates included in the study had earned in Black Hawk College classes. One requirement for an A.L.S. degree is that students have a cumulative average for

all college work of 2.00 ("C") or above. The Black Hawk College cumulative grade point average of those who have received A.L.S. degrees ranged from a low of 2.2 to a high of 4.0 (straight "A"). The mean for all graduates was 3.11, or considerably above a "B" average.

Table 4 summarizes the mean, mode, and median numbers of years for those in the study group between the date of their A.L.S. degree contracts and the date of their graduation with an A.L.S. degree and between the date of their initial enrollment at Black Hawk College and the date of their graduation with A.L.S. degrees, all data having been rounded up or down to the closest half-year (.5).

Table 4
Length of Enrollment Period in Years

Category	Range		Mean	Mode	Median
	High	Low			
Years from A.L.S. Contract to Graduation	5.00	2.00	1.26	1.00	1.00
Years from Initial BHC Enrollment to Graduation	21.00	0.50	4.32	2.00	2.50

One graduate spent five years after his or her A.L.S. contract was finalized completing necessary course work for the degree, but this period of time was the longest found among the 92 graduates included in this survey. Conversely, at least one student graduated at almost the same time that his or her A.L.S. degree contract was completed. Since degree revisions in 1977 require that students complete their A.L.S. contract before the last ten hours of enrollment, the likelihood of someone completing contract and degree requirements at almost the same time no longer exists. However, graduates included in this survey spent on the average of 1.26 years between contract and graduation completing course work. Both the mode and the median in this category were one year.

One graduate first enrolled at Black Hawk College 21 years before he or she graduated with an A.L.S. degree, and conversely, at least one graduate completed all degree requirements in one semester of residence. The mean in this category was 4.32 years; the mode was 2.00 years, and the median was 2.50 years.

The mean age at which the 92 graduates included in the study had finalized their A.L.S. contracts was 31.16 years; the median age was 28.00 years. Approximately 37% of the study group was 25 years of age or younger at the time that their contracts were finalized.

This study also investigated the demographic characteristic of the sex of the A.L.S. graduates. Forty-two members of the study group, or 45.7%, were male, and fifty, or 54.4%, were female.

Table 5 just below summarizes the number of A.L.S. graduates by calendar year.

Table 5
Graduates by Calendar Year

Year	Number	% of Total
1973	5	5.4
1974	10	10.9
1975	17	18.5
1976	20	21.7
1977	2	2.2
1978	13	14.1
1979	16	17.4
1980	9	9.9
Total	92	100.1

From 1973 to 1976, academic advisement for the A.L.S. degree was the responsibility of the college's dean of liberal studies, and graduates followed the original degree requirements that did not include the requirements that the

A.L.S. degree contract be finalized before the last ten semester hours of college coursework and that specific competencies be achieved by graduates. In 1977, academic advisement was the responsibility of a member of the counseling staff, and graduation requirements continued the same. In 1978, new graduation requirements began to take effect and responsibility for academic advisement was given to the division director of interdisciplinary and alternative study and selected faculty advisors.

Appendix D provides a summary of the 49 responses received to the questionnaire that was mailed to all A.L.S. graduates. These responses provide additional information on the graduates and their perceptions of the degree.

Forty-six of the 49 graduates responding, a total of 93.9%, reported that they felt they had met their stated educational goal through the A.L.S. degree program. As one part of the degree contract, students are required to state such a goal.

The majority of the A.L.S. graduates responding--28 or 57.1%--had not enrolled in a bachelor degree program after graduating from Black Hawk College. Since the A.L.S. degree is not intended for transfer, it would be expected that graduates would not transfer, yet 21 of the graduates responding, or 42.9%, reported that they had done so as indicated by enrollment in a bachelor degree program. By far, most of these (a total of 15) had enrolled in Western Illinois University's Board of Governor's program in East Moline, Illinois. Two had enrolled at St. Ambrose College, and one student each enrolled at the University of Illinois in Champaign, Illinois State University, and the University of Southern California.

Table 6 summarizes the use reported by A.L.S. graduates of the college's non-traditional delivery modes.

Table 6
Use of Non-Traditional Delivery Modes

Mode	Number	% of All Responders
Study Unlimited-Libraries	6	12.2
Study Unlimited-Campus	20	40.8
Cable Television Courses	6	12.2
Off-Campus Classes	11	22.4
No Response	13	26.5

More than 40% of those responding indicated that they had taken at least one course through the college's "Study Unlimited" program located in the Independent Learning Center on campus, and 12.2% of those responding indicated that they had taken at least one course in the same program located at public libraries. Over 22% of those responding had made some use of traditional classroom courses held off-campus, and over 12% had used cable television classes. Over 26% of those responding did not check one of the options in this section, suggesting that they had made no use of non-traditional delivery modes.

Table 7 summarizes responses in relation to the effect that the A.L.S. degree may or may not have had upon graduates.

Table 7
Perceived Results of Earning Degree

Reported Result	Number	Percent
Increase in Earnings	15	30.6
Upward Movement in Occupation	16	32.7
Change in Position or Classification	10	20.4
Personal Satisfaction and Improvement	46	93.9
Change in Occupation	4	8.2

Almost all graduates responding--46 or 93.9%--indicated that earning the A.L.S. degree had resulted in personal satisfaction and improvement. About 30% reported an increase in earnings/upward movement in occupation, and about 20% reported a change in position or classification that, in their perception, resulted from their attainment of the A.L.S. degree. Four graduates responding--or 8.2%--reported an actual change in occupation as a result of the degree.

VI. DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

The findings of this follow-up study of A.L.S. graduates are in many ways similar to those of the Laws' study of 1976. Table 8 just below provides a comparison of the results of both studies in relation to the type of credit that graduates used to satisfy degree requirements.

Table 8
Comparison of Two Follow-Up Studies:
Credit Types within A.L.S. Degree

Source of Credit	Mean Hours 1976 Study	Mean Hours Present Study
CLEP	16.9	15.3
Proficiency	18.4	19.0
BHC Classes	47.8	48.5
Transfer	19.3	30.6

A.L.S. graduates surveyed in the present study on the average made significantly greater use of transfer credit than those surveyed in 1976. In 1976, the mean of transfer hours that graduates applied to the A.L.S. degrees was 19.3; in the present study, it was 30.6. In other ways, there were no significant changes in relation to the types of credit used by graduates. Changes made in the recruitment and screening of degree candidates as a result of the 1976 study may account for changes in the number of transfer hours included in degrees; for older students, who have been educational "drop-outs" or "stop-outs," are more likely to have transfer credit.

Table 9 provides a comparison of the results of both studies in relation to graduates' perceptions of the impact that the A.L.S. degree has had upon their lives.

Table 9
Comparison of Two Follow-Up Studies:
Effect of A.L.S. on Graduates' Lives

Category	Percentage Reporting 1976	Percentage Reporting Present Study
Increase in Earnings	22.2	30.6
Upward Movement in Occupation	16.7	32.7
Change in Position or Classification	13.9	20.4
Personal Satisfaction and Improvement	63.9	93.9
Change in Occupation	27.8	8.2

In general, graduates responding to the present study reported more positive effects of the A.L.S. degree on their lives than in the 1976 study, although responses were certainly positive at that time. Specifically, changes were most significant in relation to personal satisfaction, upward movement in occupation, and change in position or classification. On the other hand, in the 1976 study, a significantly higher percent of graduates reported a change in occupation as a result of the A.L.S. degree. Possible explanations for these changes are not clear, although they may result from changes in the recruitment and screening of degree candidates.

Table 10 below provides a comparison of the results of both studies in relation to other comparable points.

Table 10
Comparison of Two Follow-Up Studies:
Other Comparable Characteristics

Characteristic	1976 Study	Present Study
Percent Transferring after Graduation	41.0	57.1
Percent Using Non-Traditional Modes	68.0	73.5
Cumulative Grade Point Average	3.07	3.11
Mean Years to Earn A.L.S.	3.86	4.32

The major difference between the two survey groups is in relation to the percent of graduates who transferred to a bachelor's program after receiving the A.L.S. In the 1976 study, 41% transferred; in the present study, 57.1% did so. A likely possible cause for this change is the increased size and visibility of Western Illinois University's Board of Governor's degree program in the area since 1976.

Another major difference between the two survey groups is in relation to the mean number of years that it took graduates to earn an A.L.S. degree. There was an increase from 3.86 years in the 1976 study to 4.32 years in the present study. A possible cause for this change is the degree requirement that was established in 1977 necessitating ten hours of course work after finalization of the A.L.S. contract.

In relation to demographic characteristics surveyed, A.L.S. graduates resemble in most ways the adult student clientele identified by Houle for external degrees. There were more females than males among graduates, although not significantly so. Nevertheless, women were well represented in the population. The mean age at which the 92 graduates included in the study had finalized their degree contracts was 31.16 years, with 63% of the group 26 years of age or older at that time. Thus, graduates were considerably older than traditional college age. In addition, on the average, these students spent 4.32 years at Black Hawk College completing a two-year program; thus, they either enrolled on a part-time basis or "stopped-out" during the time from until enrollment until graduation.

Once these students had finalized their A.L.S. degree contracts, their progress toward a degree was considerably accelerated. The mean number of years between contract and graduation was 1.26 years, suggesting the success of

A.L.S. academic advisors in assisting and encouraging students to seek credit for their prior college-level experiential learning.

In two ways, however, A.L.S. graduates differ from the clientele described by Houle. Only 3 of the 92 graduates surveyed had gained high school equivalency by means of the G.E.D. examination. In general, graduates were very good students, maintaining a mean cumulative grade average of 3.11 (4=A). Conversely, Houle had anticipated that this clientele would include large numbers of students with G.E.D.'s. Clearly, the population surveyed does not, even though continuous effort has been made to recruit students from among those who have recently passed the G.E.D. examination. Houle also expected that this clientele would include many with low academic aptitude as measured by tests. Of course, the graduates surveyed in this study may have scored poorly on such tests at some time, but, clearly, their cumulative grade averages suggest that they were good students in their college work for the A.L.S. degree.

In addition, Houle expected the clientele for external degrees to be from low socioeconomic levels and to include large members from ethnic and racial minority groups. As noted previously, accurate information on membership in ethnic and racial minority groups is difficult to obtain from college records, and accurate information on socioeconomic levels is difficult to obtain in any manner. Thus, this study did not provide data for conclusions in relation to these two demographic characteristics.

In general, the results of this study reveal that A.L.S. graduates make considerable use of non-traditional modes of instruction and of credit earned in ways additional to enrollment in Black Hawk College courses, suggesting that the degree is at least partly successful as a complex-systems model. Approximately 65% of the credit applied to the A.L.S. degree was earned in Black Hawk

College courses; the remainder came from transfer, CLEP, military service credit, or Black Hawk College departmental proficiency and validation procedures. Graduates responding to the survey also reported considerable use of the college's non-traditional delivery modes--"Study Unlimited" media courses in public libraries and at the college's Independent Learning Center, "Study Unlimited" home study courses centered in the same locations, cable television classes, or traditional classes held off-campus. Approximately 73.5% of those graduates responding had made some use of these delivery modes.

In general, A.L.S. graduates responding to the survey perceived that completing the degree had had a positive effect upon their lives and careers. And a suprisingly large number of graduates reported that they had enrolled in a bachelor degree program after graduating from Black Hawk College, mostly in Western Illinois University/BOG's external degree program located in East Moline, Illinois. Failure to reach a large number of A.L.S. graduates by mail may have had significant effects on the validity of these data in relation to A.L.S. graduates in general. Because A.L.S. graduates have not, in general, followed a traditional pattern of lower-division coursework, transfer to a traditional college or university would be very difficult.

The results of this study suggest that there have been fewer A.L.S. graduates by year since 1978, the year in which modifications in the degree made in 1977 first began to be implemented and also the year in which faculty members began to serve as A.L.S. advisors. However, a casual relationship does not necessarily exist here, for, in general, the number of Black Hawk College graduates has been declining since 1975.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that similar follow-up studies on graduates be completed every five years and that they include efforts to determine the socio-economic level, high school rank, and membership in ethnic and racial groups of graduates.
2. It is recommended that present recruitment and screening procedures for A.L.S. degree candidates be continued but that greater efforts be made to recruit from those who have gained high school equivalency by means of the G.E.D. examination.
3. It is recommended that the present academic advisement system for A.L.S. degree candidates be continued, for it has been demonstrated to be successful in developing degree program courses of study that have served well the needs of students, in assisting students in gaining credit for their previous college-level experiential learning, and in making students aware of available non-traditional modes of instruction.
4. It is recommended that A.L.S. academic advisors continue to work closely with Western Illinois University's BOG program to assist students in preparing for transfer, for a significant number of A.L.S. graduates have reported that they did continue college there.
5. It is recommended that the community and the college faculty be made aware of the results of this study as a means to identify additional individuals who may be well-served by this degree program and also as another method of alleviating concerns of very traditional faculty concerning the degree program.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

A.L.S. FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Did you complete the A.L.S. degree requirements and receive your diploma?

☐ Yes ☐ No

2. Do you feel that you met your stated educational goal through the A.L.S. program?

☐ Yes ☐ No

3. Did you or have you enrolled in a bachelor degree program after graduating from Black Hawk?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, where? _____

4. Please check any of the following non-traditional modes of instruction that you used in completing your A.L.S. degree:

☐ Study Unlimited courses at public libraries
☐ Study Unlimited courses at the ILC on campus
☐ Cable television courses
☐ College-credit regular classroom courses held off-campus

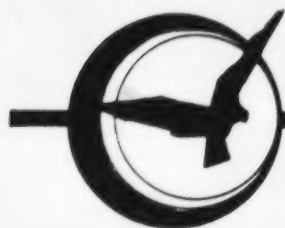
5. In your opinion, did the fact that you earned an A.L.S. degree result in any of the following (check all that apply):

☐ Increase in earnings
☐ Upward movement in your occupation
☐ Change in position or classification
☐ Personal satisfaction and improvement
☐ Change in your occupation

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION

Please return in enclosed self-addressed, prepaid envelope.

APPENDIX B: FIRST COVER LETTER

**BLACK HAWK COLLEGE**

6600 34th Avenue / Moline, Illinois 61265 Phone 309/796-1311

January 26, 1981

Dear Associate in Liberal Studies Graduate,

The Associate in Liberal Studies Degree is now entering its ninth year of operation at Black Hawk College. During this time, many students have entered and exited from the program to graduation. In 1976-77, Dr. Charles E. Laws, then Dean of Liberal Studies, completed a follow-up study among students regarding the program. Perhaps you participated in the study at that time.

This year, Dean Laws has suggested to me that I complete a similar follow-up study, once again to determine from your responses whether or not the A.L.S. degree is fulfilling your personal needs and goals. Therefore, I am asking you to please complete the enclosed questionnaire as soon as possible and return it to me. You will note that the majority of the information that I am requesting cannot be verified in existing College records; so, please do take the time necessary to respond to each question.

You will notice that there is a code number written at the top of your questionnaire. The purpose of this code number is for follow-up only, and in all ways, your responses will be considered anonymous. When we receive your completed questionnaire, we will use the number to verify that it has been returned. Then, if we do not receive a satisfactory response rate, we will once again notify those who have not responded and request that they assist us in making our survey complete and accurate.

Following the completion of this survey, I will be sharing the results with you by mail so that you can see how your responses compare with others.

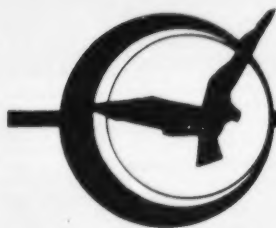
Thank you very much for your assistance in this respect. Information from graduates, such as you, assists Black Hawk College in methodically evaluating its programs.

Sincerely,

Mary A. Stevens
Division Director, Developing Programs

MAS:pf
Enc.

APPENDIX C: SECOND COVER LETTER

**BLACK HAWK COLLEGE**

6600 34th Avenue / Moline, Illinois 61265 Phone 309/796-1311

Dear A.L.S. Graduate,

Recently I wrote requesting your help in gathering follow-up information on what has happened to A.L.S. graduates. This sort of information is very useful to us in evaluating the success of our degree programs.

Response to this request has been good, but I have not yet received enough responses to ensure accuracy in the data. Therefore, I'm asking you if you would please take just five minutes to respond since you have not yet done so.

Enclosed is a short questionnaire for you to complete and a self-addressed prepaid envelop.

Just check proper responses on the questionnaire, fold it, put it in the envelop and mail. You'll help us a great deal by doing so.

Sincerely,

Mary A. Stevens
Division Director
Developing Programs

MAS/ch

APPENDIX D: SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESPONSES

A.L.S. FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Did you complete the A.L.S. degree requirements and receive your diploma?

/49/ Yes 100% / No

2. Do you feel that you met your stated educational goal through the A.L.S. program?

/46/ Yes 93.9% /3/ No 6.1

3. Did you or have you enrolled in a bachelor degree program after graduating from Black Hawk?

/21/ Yes 42.9% /28/ No 57.1

If yes, where? _____

WIU/BOG	15	St. Ambrose	2
ISU	1	U of I	1
		U of S CA	1

4. Please check any of the following non-traditional modes of instruction that you used in completing your A.L.S. degree:

<u>6</u>	Study Unlimited courses at public libraries	12.2	No Response	13 - 26.5%
<u>20</u>	Study Unlimited courses at the ILC on campus	40.8		
<u>6</u>	Cable television courses	12.2		
<u>11</u>	College-credit regular classroom courses held off-campus	22.4		

5. In your opinion, did the fact that you earned an A.L.S. degree result in any of the following (check all that apply):

<u>15</u>	Increase in earnings	30.6
<u>16</u>	Upward movement in your occupation	32.7
<u>10</u>	Change in position or classification	20.4
<u>46</u>	Personal satisfaction and improvement	93.9
<u>4</u>	Change in your occupation	8.2%

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION

Please return in enclosed self-addressed, prepaid envelop.